

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 08248 01 OF 02 241954Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
MCT-01 IO-13 /080 W
-----104508 242105Z /73

R 241653Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6458
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 08248

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PINT UK EI
SUBJECT: IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS THE NORTH--THE
SOFT SELL

CONGEN BELFAST DRAFTED THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE MAY 23.

SUMMARY: IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER O'KENNEDY VISITED
NORTHERN IRELAND MAY 17-18 TO IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. HE PERFORMED SUPERBLY, AND THE
TONE OF HIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TALK WAS WARM AND
CONCILIATORY. HIS CHOICE OF WORDS AND EMPHASIS LEFT THE
IMPRESSION THAT THE LYNCH GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO
DOWNPLAY THE IMMEDIACY OF THE IRISH UNITY ISSUE, ALTHOUGH
THERE WAS NO INDICATION OF A CHANGE IN POLICY. END
SUMMARY.

1. O'KENNEDY VISITED BELFAST AND LONDONDERRY INFORMALLY.
HE TALKED WITH SENIOR ALLIANCE PARTY LEADERS, MID-LEVEL
LEADERS OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY
(SENIOR LEADERS KNOW HIM WELL), AND OTHERS. ONE INFORMED
JOURNALIST WROTE THAT O'KENNEDY SAW SOME OFFICIAL
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PAGE 02 LONDON 08248 01 OF 02 241954Z

UNIONISTS, BUT THERE WAS NO OFFICIAL CONTACT. INDEED,
PARTY LEADER HARRY WEST DISMISSED HIM OFFHANDLY, AND
WE HEAR THAT AN O'KENNEDY AIDE WAS TOLD WEST WOULD NOT
ACCEPT AN INVITATION. WE ASSUME THAT REV. IAN PAISLEY
WAS NOT APPROACHED. NOR DID O'KENNEDY SPEAK TO THE
GOVERNMENT. A FEW OFFICIALS MAY HAVE BEEN MIFFED THAT A
VISITING FOREIGN MINISTER SHOULD TALK WITH POLITICAL

FIGURES, ESPECIALLY WHEN HE DID NOT TALK TO THEM, BUT
SENIOR OFFICIALS WERE VERY PLEASED WITH THE VISIT.

2. O'KENNEDY RECEIVED GOOD COVERAGE. THE FOLLOWING
PRINCIPAL POINTS EMERGE FROM PRESS QUOTES AND PARAPHRASE

-- HE CAME TO ESTABLISH THE BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING
AND TRUST BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. THE NEED TO
COMMUNICATE WITH ALL DIFFERING TRADITIONS AND ATTITUDES.

-- IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING IS ESSENTIAL FOR PEACE
IN IRELAND. ENCOURAGE THE IRISH TO COME TOGETHER BY
"CONSENT, BY NEGOTIATION AND UNDER AGREED STRUCTURES."
NO MODEL OR TIMETABLE, NO COERCION, AND THE GOI IS NOT
LOOKING FOR A UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF UK INTENT TO
WITHDRAW.

-- COMPLIMENTS TO THE NORTH: SOUTHERNERS ARE SOME-
TIMES ILL INFORMED AND DO NOT CREDIT NORTHERNERS'
"STERLING ACHIEVEMENTS."

-- EMPHASIZE CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC COOPERATION.
GOOD PROGRESS IS BEING MADE.

-- THE GOI IS TOTALLY OPPOSED TO VIOLENCE AND
PLEDGED ITS FULL RESOURCES TO DEAL WITH IT. THE UK AND
GOI AGREED TO COORDINATE THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE
MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY. IN THE FUTURE, THE FIRST SIGN OF
FRICTION BETWEEN THEM WILL BE HEADED OFF BEFORE IT GETS
TO THE PUBLIC.

-- THE GOI EDUCATED U.S. PUBLIC OPINION ON THE
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PAGE 03 LONDON 08248 01 OF 02 241954Z

EVILS OF VIOLENCE.

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PAGE 01 LONDON 08248 02 OF 02 241953Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 08248

-- IT SEEKS NO OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE--FROM THE U.S.
UN, EUROPE OR ANYWHERE.

-- POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS VITAL TO RESTORE NORMALITY
IN NI, BUT THE FORM IS UP TO THE PEOPLE CONCERNED.
CAVEAT: THE GOI BELIEVES POLITICS MUST BE BASED ON
"PARTNERSHIP" ("POWER-SHARING" DID NOT APPEAR IN PRINT).

3. REACTION TO THE VISIT WAS GENERALLY FAVORABLE,
ALTHOUGH THERE WERE STRICTURES. THE UNIONIST-ORIENTED
"NEWS LETTER" SAW A HOPEFUL SIGN OF A SOFTER LINE BUT
SUGGESTED THE WORD "UNITY" BE FORGOTTEN FOR A LONG TIME
TO COME. THE NATIONALIST "IRISH NEWS" SAID THE VISIT
WAS A TREMENDOUS STEP FORWARD AND THAT IT WAS ABOUT
TIME A SENIOR IRISH MINISTER HAD COME. BUT IT COULD NOT
RESIST SPEAKING OF UNIONIST "CHEAP DOUBLETALK."

4. COMMENT: THE VISIT WAS A GOOD THING. IT DID NOT
INFLAME THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE. THIS WAS DUE TO
O'KENNEDY'S SUPERBLY SENSITIVE PERFORMANCE, BUT ALSO TO
THE DEFLATION IN TENSION AFTER THE MAY 5 MEETING BETWEEN
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PAGE 02 LONDON 08248 02 OF 02 241953Z

O'KENNEDY AND SECRETARY OF STATE ROY MASON. OBVIOUSLY
THE GOI DECIDED TO AVOID CONTROVERSY AND EMPHASIZE THE
LONG TERM, PACIFIC THRUST OF ITS IRISH UNITY POLICY.

5. IN DISCUSSING THE VISIT AND THE EARLIER UK-IRISH
ARGUMENT, SENIOR NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE OFFICIALS
MAY 23 SAID THE MINI-CONFRONTATION HAD HAD TWO USEFUL
RESULTS: THE SECURITY OF THE BORDER WAS NOW A SUBJECT
OF DISCUSSION, AND THE GOI HAD GIVEN ITS MOST EXPLICIT
PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO COOPERATION IN SECURITY.

STREATOR

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